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Patton Oswalt Scores a Touchdown

By [Sara Vilkomerson](#)

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Big Fan

Running time 85 minutes

Written and directed by

Robert Siegel

Starring Patton Oswalt, Kevin

Corrigan, Michael Rapaport

Here's a little movie opening this weekend that might get overshadowed by some of the shlocky, studio-dump features coming our way at the end of

August (we're talking about you, *The Final Destination* and *Halloween II*), but it's one that is very much worth seeing. *Big Fan*, starring Patton Oswalt, is one of those rare films that is totally unpredictable, funny and sort of painfully depressing all at the same time.

Mr. Oswalt plays Paul Aufiero, a 35-year-old underground parking garage attendant who lives with his mother in Staten Island. His whole life—and we mean *whole*—revolves around his die-hard fandom of the New York Giants. On big game



Train in vain: Patton Oswalt looks grumpy in *Big Fan*

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days, he and his buddy Sal (Kevin Corrigan) drive to the Giants Stadium parking lot, where they sit and watch the game on a little TV that they plug into the car's cigarette lighter. At night, Paul calls into the sports-radio station 760 The Zone, where he is known as "Staten Island Paul" and pretends to give off-the-cuff shit-talking that he had actually carefully prepared during his work shift. Much of his ire is saved for his longtime nemesis, the Philadelphia Eagles, and in particular "Philadelphia Phil," who dares to trash Paul's beloved Giants on the air. In fact, the very likable Paul is rather muted and miserable when he's engaged in any activity *not* connected to the Giants—whether it's his visits to his more successful brother's McMansion, or even when he's quietly masturbating under the covers.

One evening, Sal and Paul are eating a slice of pizza in the neighborhood when they spy Paul's favorite Giants player, quarterback Quantrell Bishop. They decide to follow him into the city, and trail him into a strip club, where a misunderstanding leads to Paul getting the crap beat out of him by Bishop and put in the hospital for three days, while the player is suspended upon further investigation. Paul's family wants him to sue. The police want him to press charges. But all Paul cares about is: How are the Giants going to make it to the playoffs without their quarterback?

Even up to this film's final moments, I had no idea where exactly it was going (which, in a summer of *The Ugly Truth*, is a welcome relief). This is the first leading role for Patton Oswalt, better known for his stand-up and voice-over work than his supporting film roles, and he conveys Paul's inner turmoil beautifully. It would be easy to dismiss Paul's life as small and insignificant—his family certainly doesn't seem to understand it, and they nag him to find better work and settle down with a wife and kids. But the film is respectful of the fact that there is only one thing that makes Paul happy, and he doesn't want to change a thing.

Writer-director Robert Siegel was once the editor in chief of *The Onion*, as well as the screenwriter of last year's *The Wrestler*. In fact, it was *this* script that caught the eye of *Wrestler* director Darren Aronofsky—after reading *Big Fan*, he asked Mr. Siegel if he'd be interested in writing a film set in the world of professional wrestling. Randy the Ram and Paul, not to mention both of Siegel's stories, do, in

fact, share some DNA. There's nothing pretty about the gray skies and bitter winds and general nuttiness of the die-hard sports fan in *Big Fan*. Still, Mr. Siegel nails so many quirky details (and don't even get us started on just how awesomely right it is to have cast Michael Rapaport as Philadelphia Phil), and finds humor in the smallest of moments, that *Big Fan* is surprisingly poignant, too. Also worth noting for the sports-averse: There is zero actual football in this movie.

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